



ADVISOR



TEACHERS, EMPLOYEES, PUBLIC, STATE POLICE AND JUDICIAL

Vol. XXXIII — No. 12

SERVING OVER 320,000 MEMBERS

June 2008

“Here We Go Again”

By Lindy J. Beale, Legislative Counsel



The Governor will have to call a “Special Session” because the Senate failed to pass the Education Trust Fund budget. The Senate adjourned at midnight without approving the budget as well as many other important bills. The members could never reach a compromise over four-year universities’ push for additional money. Also lost in the process was the ERS lump-sum bonus, which was to be paid in December.

Governor Riley signed the General Fund budget into law. However, he used the line item veto on a section of the budget that would have protected several agencies in case of proration. The Governor believes this provision may have violated the Alabama Constitution and state law. In the unfortunate event that proration becomes necessary, it must be spread proportionately among all state agencies.

The RSA will let members know when the Legislature will be called back to finish the work they were supposed to do in the Regular Session.

COLA Meeting

By David G. Bronner

I recently met with the COLA Ad Hoc Committee, headed by Immediate Past President Joe McFerrin of the Alabama Education Retirees’ Association (AERA). At the meeting, we discussed funding for future Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA). Last year, TRS members received a bonus check instead of a COLA. Neither a bonus check nor a COLA is in the current budget. Retired state employees received half of the bonus check last year and depending on passage in the Special Session will receive the other half this year.

In the past, TRS retirees often received a COLA when active teachers received a raise. Times have greatly changed. One of the reasons is that the number of retirees has greatly increased over the last decade. Today, the TRS has 64,449 retirees compared to 39,966 in 1998. Another reason is that people are living longer. In 1990, a 65-year-old was expected to live to age 77, whereas today the life expectancy for a 65-year-old is age 84. Even more importantly, COLAs from 2000-2006 amounted to 18% and put \$3.2 billion in obligations on the books. This, along with investment losses during the market crash of 2001-2002, has caused the TRS funding ratio to fall to 83%, well short of our 100% goal.

COLAs are important, but are not our number one objective. For example, granting a COLA while increasing the cost for health care at the same time does not benefit our members. RSA members must recognize that we have exceptional pension and health benefits, and the RSA does everything possible to maintain them. Remember that California retired teachers do not even receive health care benefits. Thus, our main objective must be to preserve the benefits we have now.

The second major objective is to work very diligently to elect politicians who support you and the RSA, especially if we want our elected officials to seriously consider additional benefits. As Dr. Stan Wilson pointed out at the meeting, RSA investments have done great things for all of Alabama, and Alabama should support reasonable COLA adjustments when funds are available. But to get to that point, our members must elect and support politicians who support the RSA.

RSA Retirement Payrolls

Per Month

Retirement payrolls increase each year because of more retirees and the excellent health care benefits that have extended life expectancies.

RSA members have an excellent level of pension and health benefits. For this to continue, elect politicians who support the RSA.

TRS			ERS		Judicial	
		Retirees		Retirees		Retirees
April 2008	\$109.0 Million	64,449	\$50.8 Million	34,307	\$1.9 Million	310
April 1998	\$46.8 Million	39,966	\$22.2 Million	23,212	\$834 Thousand	241
April 1988	\$15.6 Million	23,508	\$7.5 Million	14,592	\$341 Thousand	151

Big Project for Small Papers

Source: *American Journalism Review*

“Two years ago, Birmingham, Alabama-based Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc., (CNHI) decided to use its corporate resources to generate investigative stories for its 90-plus daily newspapers. Each of these pieces would be too formidable for the small papers to tackle by themselves; this would be a way to provide all of them with in-depth reporting.

Bill Ketter, CNHI's vice president of news, oversees the Elite Reporting Fellowship program. His former position as editor in chief at the Pulitzer Prize-winning Eagle-Tribune in North Andover, Massachusetts, which CNHI bought in 2005, made him an ideal candidate to lead the new program.

...The first package to emerge from the program was 'Hooked on Gambling,' a three-part series in April 2006 on the problems of gambling addicts and the

meager resources available to help them. Since then, the program has produced five more series, including 'America's Interstate,' which dealt with the Interstate Highway System's crumbling infrastructure, and 'Playing Hurt,' which looked at the dangers to which untrained coaches expose young athletes.

...All CNHI reporters are allowed to apply for the fellowship by submitting an application and a sample of their work to a committee of four corporate CNHI editors. Once reporters are accepted into the program, CNHI assigns them topics and they are released from their newsroom duties for the duration of the project (generally a month to six weeks) so they can pursue their stories without interruption.

...Beyond the immediate injection of high-quality reporting into the chain's dailies, about 80 percent of which run

the stories, the fellowship means added benefits for papers whose journalists participate.

...Still, for Ketter, the articles themselves are the greatest reward. 'I'm a believer in the watchdog role of the press,' he says. 'We're a guide dog and we're a watchdog. Every newspaper, no matter how small, has to fulfill those roles.

'Despite the economic challenges, our company has not backed off one iota. We've invested more last year than the year before [in the program] and I hope we invest even more this year.'"

(Editor's Note: CNHI, with 90 dailies, is primarily funded by the RSA and operates in 22 states, and also has 72 non-daily publications and 4 television stations. View all CNHI newspapers at www.cnhi.com.)

“Wow – What an Opportunity!”

Alabama School of Fine Arts

The Alabama School of Fine Arts, a 2007 Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network national award nominee, is a tuition-free, public school for talented Alabama students in grades 7-12. ASFA is located in Birmingham. Acceptance is by audition only in one of six specialty areas: Creative Writing, Dance, Math/Science, Music, Theatre Arts and Visual Arts.

ASFA is proud of the fact that 100% of its graduating seniors receive scholarships and attend a myriad of prestigious colleges, universities and conservatories throughout the United States. In addition, six of the National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts' Talent Search winners are from ASFA out of almost 8,000 entrants nationwide.

This year, ASFA has eight National Merit finalists, three National Achievement finalists and two juniors who scored a perfect 36 on their ACT tests. Actually, the American College Testing Service lists ASFA's average ACT score as 26.4. In addition, ASFA has four UAB University Scholars Award winners, two (of 10 nationally admitted) students entering UAB's Early Medical School Admission Program, and won the 2007 Creative Ticket School of Excellence Award by the Alabama Alliance for Arts Education.

The Office of Admissions is always on the lookout for qualified students and can be reached at 205.252.6617 or online at www.asfa.k12.al.us.



WANT TO HELP?

A FREE Car Tag

Tired of that worn-out dealer tag on the front of your car? Would you like to help the RSA and our Alabama Tourist Department advertise "Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail" on your front bumper? If so, call Tisha or Deborah to request a tag at (334) 242-5718, or 800-214-2158, ext. 1503, or write:

Tag
P.O. Box 302150
Montgomery, AL
36130-2150

Clueless In America

By Bob Herbert, *New York Times*

“We don’t hear a great deal about education in the presidential campaign. ...The nation’s future may depend on how well we educate the current and future generations because an American kid drops out of high school every 26 seconds. That’s more than a million every year, a sign of big trouble for these largely clueless youngsters in an era in which a college education is crucial to maintaining a middle class quality of life—and for the country as a whole in a world that is becoming more hotly competitive every day.

...‘We have one of the highest dropout rates in the industrialized world,’ said Allan Golston, the president of U.S. programs for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. ...He described the situation as ‘actually pretty scary, alarming.’ Roughly a third of all American high school students drop out. Another third graduate but are not prepared for the next stage of life – either productive work or some form of post-secondary education. When two-thirds of all teenagers old enough to graduate from high school are incapable of mastering college-level work, the nation is doing something awfully wrong. Mr. Golston noted that the performance of American students, when compared with their peers in other countries, tends to grow increasingly dismal as they move through the higher grades: ‘In math and science, for example, our fourth graders are among the top students globally. By roughly eighth grade, they’re in the middle of the pack. And by the 12th grade, U.S. students are scoring generally near the bottom of all industrialized countries.’

...The Educational Testing Service, in a report titled ‘America’s Perfect Storm,’ cited three powerful forces that are affecting the quality of life for millions of Americans and already shaping the nation’s future. They are: 1) The wide disparity in the literacy and math skills of both the school-age and adult populations. These skills, which play such a tremendous role in the lives of individuals and families, vary widely across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. 2) The ‘seismic changes’ in the U.S. economy that have resulted from globalization, technological advances, shifts in the relationship of labor and capital, and other developments. 3) Sweeping demographic changes. By 2030, the U.S. population is expected to reach 360 million. That population will be older and substantially more diverse, with immigration having a big impact on both the population as a whole and the work force.

These and so many other issues of crucial national importance require an educated populace if they are to be dealt with effectively. At the moment we are not even coming close to equipping the population with the intellectual tools that are needed. While we’re effectively standing in place, other nations are catching up and passing us when it comes to educational achievement. You have to be pretty dopey not to see the implications of that....”

(Editor’s note: Today, 60% of jobs need more than a high school education. By 2020, it is projected to rise to 70%.)

RSA Web Site has New Look and New Address

www.rsa-al.gov

The RSA Web site not only has a new look, but a new address as well: www.rsa-al.gov. Even if you use the old address, you will be redirected to the new site. The new site will have an updated and improved **Member Online Services** section in July to view your demographic information and change your address online. You will need to register first if you have not already done so. PEEHIP members can read more information on the Member Online Services features in this month’s PEEHIP Quarterly. The RSA will be adding even more online services for ERS, TRS and RSA-1 in the near future. *Visit the RSA Web site today and view important information regarding legislation affecting the RSA, a retirement calculator, all forms and publications, and much, much more.*

ERS Board of Control Election Results

Congratulations to Mr. James Fibbe who was elected to the Retired Local Employee position. His three-year term will begin on October 1, 2008.

TRS Board Election Notice

Candidates are currently being sought for the Principal Position, Teacher Position No. 3, and Support Personnel Position No. 2 for the TRS Board of Control. Applicants must submit completed nomination petitions by 4:00 p.m., September 5, 2008, to be eligible. Nomination packets are available at our new Web site address www.rsa-al.gov or contact the Elections Coordinator at 800-214-2158, extension 1573. The Regular Election will take place in October 2008. The Principal Position is currently held by Dr. Carl Ponder, the Teacher Position No. 3 by Ms. Judy Rigdon, and the Support Personnel Position No. 2 by Mrs. Sharon Saxon.

ENJOY YOUR SUMMER
A Special Deal
FOR RSA MEMBERS

**The Battle House,
A Renaissance Hotel – Mobile – \$89**

- June 13–15
- August 1–2, 16–17, 21–24, 28–31

**The Renaissance Riverview Plaza –
Mobile – \$79**

- June 13–15
- August 1–2, 16–17, 21–24, 28–31

Marriott Grand – \$89 plus a 14% resort fee

- June 4–5, 8 • July 6–7, 23
- August 3–6, 10–21, 24–27

Marriott Grand – RSA Golf Package – \$159

Ask for code – LOCD

Includes: Deluxe Room, One Round of Golf for Two People.

Call for Tee Times after booking package

- June 4–5, 18 • July 6–7, 23
- August 3–6, 10–21, 24–27

Marriott Shoals – Florence – \$79

- June 1–2, 8–9, 22, 29–30
- July 6–8, 13–14, 20–21, 27–29
- August 3, 10–12, 17, 24–25, 27–28

Renaissance Ross Bridge – Hoover – \$89

- June 1–3, 4–8, 10, 29–30
- July 1–2, 6, 13, 14, 24
- August 3–4, 17–18, 24–25

Opelika Marriott – \$79

- June 3–4, 8–9, 12–16, 20–26, 29–30
- July 1–10, 13–16, 20, 22–23, 27–31
- August 1–7, 10–28, 31

Prattville Marriott – \$79

- June 1, 7–10, 14–15, 21–22, 29–30
- July 1–17, 20, 25–30
- August 3–6, 10–12, 14–23, 28, 30–31

Renaissance Montgomery – \$89

- June 1–2, 9, 21–22, 25–30
- July 1–5, 11–17, 19, 30–31
- August 1–5, 9–13, 17–23, 28–31

RSA Spa Package – \$149

Ask for code – LOCD Includes Deluxe Room

- June 1–2, 9, 29–30 • July 1–2, 13–16, 30
- August 3–5, 10–13, 17–20, 31

Book early because the rooms are limited at these special rates.

These rates are not applicable to groups or conventions.

Code: RABM, 800-228-9290

‘Code Blue’ Is Deadlier After 11 p.m.

Source: *Associated Press*

“Many hospitals call it ‘code blue,’ a signal given over the intercom when a patient’s heart has stopped. When code blue works well, a team speeds to the bedside and revives the patient.

The graveyard shift is the worst time to call code blue, a new study finds. Patients who go into cardiac arrest while in the hospital are more likely to die if it occurs after 11p.m., when staffing may be lower or patients watched less closely....

Staff members who are fatigued, less experienced or too few in number could be to blame, researchers speculated. Weekends had lower survival rates than weekdays, but the difference wasn’t as pronounced as between late-night and daytime hours.

Only in the emergency room was there no night-or-day difference in survival....”

Ross Bridge RSA Special Father’s Day Package \$154

Ask for code RABR

Book online with Promo code R2A

Available June 13, 14, 15



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